Ecotourism in Australia

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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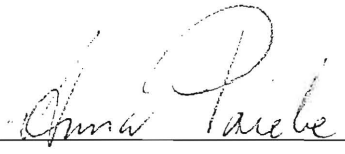

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Abstract

Ecotourism is a branch of the tourism industry that came into fruition during the 1990s. This form of tourism strives to protect the native cultures and environments of destinations while entertaining and informing tourists of all ages. For many years people within the tourism industry have debated what destinations and practices truly qualify as ecotourism without reaching a definitive consensus. This controversy, I will suggest, originates from a lack of leadership among policy makers and the fundamental contradiction of selfishness and selflessness that constitutes the business of making environmental and cultural experiences a consumer product. The goal of my thesis is to explore the current status of the ecotourism industry in general and Australian ecotourism in particular. Australia has always been a leader in the development of ecotourism. While their certification program provides a model for the industry, I believe that their practices also expose some of the central paradoxes and problems of the trade overall, as well as areas for improvement. Australia's biodiversity, rich indigenous culture, and natural beauty represent a particularly important resource for better understanding our world and environment, a resource that demands our utmost protection.

In addition to my paper, I have included an Artist Statement and brochure that showcase potential ecotourism experiences within the different regions of Australia and promote ecotourism overall.

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Introduction

I was hiking a trail in Bald Rock National Park with my classmates on our first big trek into the Australian wilderness. Some of the students enjoy bouldering as a hobby, so upon seeing the large boulders along our trail, they were overjoyed and just itching to climb them. I wanted to be right there scaling rocks with the rest of my group, but I knew that trails are marked for a reason. Our professor, a native Australian, quickly reiterated that point to us. He informed us that by straying from the trails, we were disrupting the natural path from which the water drains down the mountain. While this seemed like an insignificant impact, he explained that the drainage was connected to erosion patterns and other aspects of the ecosystem. As tourists we were unfamiliar with how delicate the Australian environment truly is.

Visiting Australia had been a personal goal of mine for many years. Being so far away from where I live, the Land Down Under was full of mystery and had always sparked my curiosity. My dream came true in the spring semester of my senior year at Ball State University when I was able to be a tourist, an explorer, and a student all in one trip. It was an experience I will always be thankful for. During my visit, I challenged myself to be an ecotourist, especially after my professor's comment. Even though many of my activities were planned out for me, I tried to be sensitive to my surroundings. I stayed on marked trails and obeyed signs posted along the way. I also made an effort to learn as much about the culture of the nation as I could through guidebooks before my visit as well as class lectures while I was there. I thought it important to be aware of my place in an environment that needs care and protection if it is to continue to exist for our edification and enjoyment.

Throughout my visit I noticed what a popular destination Australia is. With so many delicate ecosystems and natural assets, it is imperative that Australians preserve these elements for their personal use and the experience of tourists in the future. One of the best methods of protection for delicate ecosystems like those found in Australia is the development of ecotourism. Although there is some debate about how to define ecotourism, it is broadly defined as the earth-sensitive segment of the tourism world. Like all tourism, it is meant to create an enjoyable travel experience. However, unlike other forms of tourism, ecotourism consciously encourages tourists to be aware of the effect they have on the culture and environment they have come to enjoy.

In my thesis I discuss the controversy surrounding the definition of ecotourism and establish what it is and what it is not in comparison to other forms of tourism. I also address the harmful effects from ecotourism that hurt both the destinations it hopes to promote and protect and its own potential future as an industry. Much of this degradation is due to poor organization and lack of commitment to conservation. In the second section, I examine the changes in leadership in Australia's ecotourism industry over time. I see this country as an excellent example of a well-known tourist destination which experiences both the problems and potential of ecotourism. Australia is also a model of the two fundamental ideas behind ecotourism fighting for dominance, and I explore this correlation through case studies of my experiences at the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary of Queensland and The Macadamia Castle of New South Wales. Finally, in the third section, I conclude with a discussion on the importance of the ecotourism industry, despite its contradictions and flaws, and speculate on ways ecotourist destinations might be improved to brighten the future of the business.

Section I

Defining Ecotourism

Even in the early part of the 1990s, the decade was thought of as the "Decade of Eco-tourism". It was during this era that the tourism industry began to realize the social and environmental damage it creates. Over time, mass tourism has developed a reputation for being destructive through the commodification of cultures, the degradation of ecosystems, as well as the devastation of biodiversity. The commercialization and invasive nature of the industry leaves local residents of mass-tourist destinations outraged. Traditionally, developers have had a short-term and profit-oriented mindset during the planning process of tourism locations, giving little to no consideration of the impact that large numbers of tourists can cause. This behavior often results in overdevelopment and a decline in destination quality (Eadington & Smith, 1992, p. 116). Ecotourism evolved from a realization that these impacts needed to be combated to prevent damage to the resources tourism relies upon.

Nevertheless, long-standing controversy over what actually constitutes as ecotourism has led to some confusion about the principles and practices of the industry (Jenkins & Wearing, 2003, p. 205; Eadington & Smith, 1992, p. 117; Orams, 2001, p. 30). Is it simply a nature hike? Do travelers have to live without modern amenities such as electricity? Is it still ecotourism if any footprint is left? To date, there have been no clear answers to questions like these. The varying perspectives of ecotourism have been continually viewed upon a spectrum of hard core to soft. The hard end of the spectrum is for those most dedicated to preserving the environment; it is for the diehard environmentalists who fight to save every plant, animal and native culture. Those who operate on the soft end still try to protect the environment but are more lenient in

policy standards (Jenkins & Wearing, 2003, p. 206). Take the hypothetical example of a forest, known as the home of an endangered species. In mass tourism, tourists are free to do as they please, in many cases they will try to feed and interact with the animal and may even disrupt their life cycles. If the forest were managed as soft core tourism, tourism operators may conduct vehicle tours and allow tourists to photograph the endangered species; whereas hard core operators would restrict tourists to areas that do not overlap the habitat of the endangered species. This range of different procedures shows how different viewpoints create diverse outcomes and allow for varying types of tourist behavior.

Currently, the discourse on defining ecotourism favors a middle ground perspective which seeks to balance the two sides of the ecotourism spectrum. On its website, the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." The definition includes the idea that in order for an attraction to be considered ecotourist, it must be a positive experience (for visitors and host) that builds both cultural and environmental awareness and respect and adds minimal impact to the hosts and their environment. According to TIES, ecotourism must also provide financial benefits for conservation and native cultures (The International Ecotourism Society [TIES], 2012). Many other organizations have adopted a similarly broad definition for ecotourism, including the Nature Conservancy and the World Conservation Union. An agreement on definition helps to maintain continuity and ensure that a protocol is set up and followed (Nature Conservancy, 2011).

As the TIES definition suggests, there must be minimal impact upon the environment of the destination, yet this definition lacks an explanation of what that means. Martha Honey

(1999), author of *Ecotourism and sustainable development: who owns paradise?*, interpreted this to mean that despite even its best efforts, tourism causes damage through infrastructure development, waste production, and misuse of energy resources. In order to cause minimal impact, this damage must be counteracted through recycling of materials, utilization of local produce and supplies, use of renewable energy sources, proper waste disposal, as well as cultural and environmentally sensitive structural design. Tourist numbers and behaviors must also be adjusted to limit the environmental impact (Honey, 1999). While Honey provides an excellent elaboration on a broad definition, the need for clarification suggests the wide scope of the original TIES definition.

The ecotourism industry is also a culmination of environmental conservation, community involvement and sustainable travel practices. In terms of conservation, it develops financial encouragement that helps to maintain, protect, and enhance bio-cultural diversity and heritage. Communities benefit from new employment prospects and a foundation that secures against poverty. At its core ecotourism strives to enrich individual experiences and ecological awareness by means of interpretation and creates a better understanding and appreciation for nature, local society, and culture (TIES, 2012). Based on the fact that others feel the need to elaborate up the original, it is apparent that there is more to the definition of ecotourism than TIES has provided us. Without a specific definition there is room for speculation and differing opinions.

Those who prefer the hard core side of the spectrum add to the TIES definition, feeling that its general, broad language leaves too many important details up to interpretation. Laszlo Buhasz (2002) for the Globe and Mail newspaper of Canada was more specific when he defined what an ecotourism destination should be in:

> a natural setting that contains indigenous landscaping and be designed to reflect local heritage. It should also use sustainably harvested building material, purchase foodstuffs from local producers, use environmentally sensitive energy and waste-disposal systems, and offer opportunities to interact with locals.

Although Buhasz has a similar definition to that of TIES, it goes into more detail. A broad definition tries to please everyone by being general and nonspecific, but by doing so pleases no one. This lack of consensus makes the process of designing policy difficult. Specifications allows for more detail in the policy development process and the structure of ecotourism planning and management.

Ecotourism in Contrast

The absence of a definition that is universally accepted has also led people to confuse ecotourism with other niche markets such as natural, cultural, sustainable, wildlife, and adventure tourism (Honey, 1999). Unlike these other markets, that are defined by the leisure activities travelers participate in, ecotourism is based upon a set of principles that tourists must adhered to, for reference I refer back to the TIES definition (Honey, 1999; TIES, 2012). A focus on traveler responsibility, education, active community participation and conservation is what sets ecotourism apart from other forms (TIES, 2012). Traditionally, tourists embark on a journey for their personal gratification; they want to be entertained and perhaps see something new. Often the main goal of a tourist is to escape their everyday lives. Being an ecotourist is more

than that. Ecotourists set out to learn and help the world around them. They are conscious of the impact their journey has on both them and their destination.

The principals that ecotourism adheres to require more of a traveler than nature tourism where the main goal is to simply enjoy nature. It goes beyond appreciating the beauty and majesty of an environment. Without conscious effort to protect natural sites such as waterfalls, national parks, and rainforests, tourists may not respect or be aware of the damage they can cause. Should tourism take off in these areas without structure to guard them, tourists could degrade and disrupt the very site they came to see. Nature tourists set out to see what no one else has seen before, they are often bold and adventurous. While they appreciate nature, they are not always informed about how delicate it is and why it needs to be protected. The major difference between a nature tourist and an ecotourist is knowledge. They both appreciate the destination, but the ecotourist makes the effort to understand and take care of it.

An important element of ecotourism is informing the visitor about the destination. Part of what separates ecotourism from other forms of tourism is that the visitor is informed both before and during their visit. Many ecotourism destinations involve delicate environments and cultures that require great amounts of consideration and sensitivity. The traveler should arrive at their destination already sensitive to the cultural and natural environment around them. This knowledge helps them not only to appreciate the destination, but protect from further degradation (Honey, 1999).

Misconceptions and Green washing

Although ecotourism took off in the 1990s, it is still relatively new market. It is used as a buzzword used in the tourism industry for any activity that may be considered "green" whether it is beneficial to the environment or not. Posing as ecotourism to draw in customers when your business is not actually part of the industry is called green washing. The program coordinator of the United Nations Environment Program, Oliver Hillel, once said,

> true ecotourism contributes to conservation of biodiversity, sustains the well-being of local people, includes a learning experience, involves responsible action on the part of tourists, is delivered to small groups by small-scale businesses, requires the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources, and stresses ownership by the locals (Cited in Buhasz, 2002).

Green washing creates misconceptions and damages the credibility of ecotourism. Much of the criticism ecotourism receives is actually generated from those who participate in green washing. A business must make the effort to be ecological and cannot be considered so until it develops the management of protected areas and contributes to the income of the local community that also strive to preserve the natural resource. Too often businesses market minor cosmetic adjustments as cutting edge advancements. Hotels for instance have adopted the practice of providing their guests with the decision to not have their towels and sheets laundered daily. This practice does save water, but is more likely to save the hotel money than save the planet as a press release once claimed (Buhasz, 2002). These false claims poorly represent the industry and attract criticism.

Few people entering the ecotourism industry actually consider the amount of entrepreneurial skill required to keep a business running. New operators may have knowledge of

how to keep the operations environmentally friendly but not how to make it profitable. For this reason many private and public sector businesses fail. Too often they start off as lifelong dreams instead of well-planned business ventures (McKercher, 2001, p. 566). Lack of experience and knowledge can turn a desperate ecotourism operation into a green washing situation. Despite good intentions, these businesses then become degenerative rather than supportive members of the industry.

Another factor that is overlooked during ecotourism development is the cultural side of the industry. Neglecting an integral part of the business denies tourists of cultural enrichment and native peoples of development opportunities. Indigenous peoples must be involved throughout the planning and operation of tourist destinations. In the past, tourism development meant nothing more for indigenous people than the possibility of menial low paying jobs. But for a business to be considered "true" ecotourism, the native community must be able to achieve growth economically, socially, and culturally as well as develop political independence through their control and leadership. Only then will tourism be welcomed by indigenous cultures.

Many indigenous cultures including a number of the aboriginal tribes in Australia view the Earth as the mother that provides for them. The land they live on is a major part of their self-identity. They are often more spiritually connected with the land and for this reason dedicated to its protection and against the idea of using it for profit (Hinch, 2001, p.347). Tourism developers overlook the value of the knowledge indigenous cultures have to offer. The native people are usually those who know the most about the land and how best to utilize it. They are more familiar with its limitations and know what areas that can be shared with tourism without interrupting their lifestyle. In the same fashion, aboriginal peoples may have a hard time seeing

the benefits ecotourism can provide. Native peoples must be encouraged to see ecotourism as an opportunity to educate and reestablish cultural identity not only with tourists but also younger generations within the community. Tourism should be viewed as an opportunity to instill pride in cultural heritage (Wearing, 2001, p. 399).

This idea relates to a concept known as the "stakeholder theory", which states that that which brings someone profit, is more likely to be protected. The story of the goose that lays the golden eggs can be viewed as an example. If an animal provides someone with a great deal of wealth, that someone is sure to protect it from harm. In terms of native cultures, their land is the golden goose, because it empowers them to bring themselves out of poverty and revive their culture through ecotourism. By sharing their natural resource, knowledge, and culture they attract the profits of tourism. Additionally, ecotourism makes stakeholders out of the tourists themselves. It helps them to realize, through the process of their own leisure, how much they stand to profit from the world around us. It is so important that we protect the natural resources that we all share, for without them we cannot exist. Ecotourism helps to open the eyes of the average tourist of what is taking place in the world around them (Honey, 1999). By wiping away ignorance, problems and their potential solutions may become clear.

Ecotourism Paradox

For years ecotourism promoters have viewed it as a cure all for a number of the world's problems. They believe it can finance the conservation and research needed to protect delicate natural resources, it can support rural communities and fight poverty in developing countries, it

can promote ecological and cultural awareness, and it can inform the average tourist and even construct world peace (Honey, 1999). Surely ecotourism holds this sort of potential, but it has yet to reach that aspiration. Part of what makes ecotourism difficult to comprehend is that it is the pairing of two very different human behaviors, selflessness and selfishness. Tourism itself can be a very selfish industry in which people aim to reward themselves with the amusements of the world. Environmentalism is a very selfless activity in which you give to the environment and expect nothing back. Ecotourism attempts to find the middle ground in hopes of generating profit and advancing conservationism, however, the desire to be both selfish and selfless seems to be self-defeating.

An example of this paradox of ecotourism concept can be seen in the concept of zoos. It is selfish of humans to take animals from their natural habitats to be put on show for tourists. However, there are animal sanctuaries that work for the betterment of animals and promote conservation. These businesses adopt a "for the greater good" mentality and encompass the paradox inherent in ecotourism and stakeholder theory. They justify their actions by keeping a small population of well treated animals and providing the public with a chance to connect with animals to promote conservation efforts. This process can create stakeholders, without disrupting the species in its natural habitat. For these reasons it can be argued that, while animals are removed from their natural environment, this small sacrifice is better that the sacrifice of the entire population. Having the public interact with a small portion of a species is better than to have them interact with the animals in the wild, possibly altering their behavior or causing them harm. The idea of zoos suggests that a little bit of selfishness is acceptable if it helps to preserve the environment as a whole. It encourages visitors to see what the environment can do to entertain and edify them--in pursuit of a greater selflessness--the preservation of the whole

species, or the financial support of programs that will work towards environmental conservation. The idea of ecotourism is a paradox because it can not completely satisfy the need desire to be selfish and selfless.

SECTION II

Many of the concepts discussed in section one apply to Australia, the leader of the ecotourism industry. It is known in the ecotourism community for not only its reputable ecotourism industry, but also comprehensive government support and developed infrastructure. It is considered a great location for ecotourism due to its relative isolation which has made it harder to access and ruin in the past. Early settlers in Australia valued places of natural beauty more so than settlers of other regions, for this reason patches of rainforest have long been protected and provided sites for early nature based tourism (Frost, 2001, p. 198). With the advancement of transportation technology, this once land of mystery is much more accessible to tourists from around the globe.

As accessibility and the impending threat of mass tourism grew in the 1980s, ecotourism took hold in the early 1990s (Dowling, 2001, p. 143). Australia was the first to implement a certification program in 1996 and now has over one thousand certified members (Ecotourism Australia, 2012). Other accomplishments that Australia is recognized for include "hosting international ecotourism conferences, building an international research center, establishing best practice ecotourism techniques, setting up ecotourism education and training courses and developing the national ecotourism accreditation scheme". It is also considered one of the most established regions for desert ecotourism. By 2001, ecotourism accrued AU$ 250 million per

year and employed one percent of the tourism industry full time. Many of Australia's universities include ecotourism programs that educate students about the industry and conduct research (Dowling, 2001 p. 142).

Much of Australia's success in ecotourism development can be attributed to federal government research, support, and funding (Dowling, 2001, p. 142). In the past Australia struggled with policy planning due to confusion concerning the delegation of responsibility between the different levels of government. There were many different departments involved in the management and planning for natural resources. Recreation within the natural environment developed independently while focus was given to more customary responsibilities such as conservation, water management, forestry, and urban planning. Due to this lack of coordination, nature related tourism management and policy was adapted as a second thought and remained underdeveloped. Without proper control mechanisms, businesses in both the public and private sectors did whatever they could to draw in tourism income. In such a situation it is difficult to create proactive policies that prevent environmental and cultural damage (Pearce & Butler, 1993 p. 166).

Many of these difficulties were resolved upon the formation of Australia's Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism. Australians realized that they required coordination and cooperation between the various committees, groups, departments, and organizations involved in the development process (Dowling, 2001, p. 143). Upon its founding in 2007, the resources department created a unified system that determined who was responsible for the care of the nation's natural resources. According to the Australian Government website, this department helps to establish policy for development and management of tourism activity (Australian

Government, 2013). There is also a "Consultative Committee" to suggest policy to government officials who may not have a great of understanding of the industry's needs. Members of said committee come from conservation organizations, Aboriginal representatives, tourism operators, and other wildlife protection groups. Partnerships between various industry sectors and a proficient business focus have also helped to carry out goals and increase participation, allowing the business itself to thrive. This strategy has not been as successful in other countries due to issues like group dynamics and differences in loyalty (Parker, 2001, p. 510).

Australian Certification Program

In 1996, Australia became the first country in the world to develop an ecotourism specific certification program that provides a framework for destinations that desire the ecotourism label. Within this program there are three levels of certification. Nature tourism is the most basic of these levels and consists of tourism in a natural setting with minimal impact on the environment. For many professionals in the tourism field, this level does not qualify as ecotourism, it is in fact a different branch of tourism altogether. Nature tourism would be the earth sensitive hiker who goes out simply to enjoy the beauty of nature and is unaware of the impact their presence has on the environment around them. The ecotourism level of certification requires that tourists have a way to learn about the environment and that the operator supports conservation of the land and the local community. Responsible use of natural resources is also necessary. This level meets the most basic of ecotourism standards but may possibly lack some of the cultural requirements. Operators who acquire this status have worked to "green" their destinations through use of local materials and earth sensitive operation standards. They also have an educational element that

accompanies the attraction and give back or support the local community with their business proceeds. To obtain the Advanced Ecotourism certification all of the previous requirements must be met above and beyond expectation. This level of certification recognizes the most creative and beneficial businesses. Programs like these are an excellent way to set standards that ensure true ecotourism is taking place (Ecotourism Australia, 2012). It is important to establish a goal or benchmark for other countries that develop an interest in ecotourism.

Having standards in place ensures that tourists are able to identify a program of quality and that the environment is truly protected. Without such certification standards, travelers may deceived by greenwashing or other scams. The program itself relies on tourists to support the system. Before eco-certification can make a difference in the tourism industry, travelers must choose to base their purchases on whether or not their experience will be green. They should ensure that the operator is committed to building awareness both culturally and environmentally, contributes financially to conservation, provides accommodations that consider the environment's needs, offers support to local trade and shows respect to indigenous communities (Buhasz, 2002). It is not enough for the country to dedicate to the cause. Without customers to buy the product, there is no incentive to develop the system.

Australia's ecotourism certification program establishes and preserves credibility through an ongoing process. Each applicant goes through a meticulous evaluation by a group of arbitrators in order to obtain certification. The evaluation criteria within the three levels of certification mentioned above goes into greater detail of matters such as operating procedure, treatment of native people, and use of natural resources. These criteria are regularly updated to meet the industry standards for best practice. Guests can also provide feedback of their opinion

of the certified operator. An audit of all certification requirements is conducted within three years of achieving certification (Ecotourism Australia, 2012). This process helps to ensure that the program sincerely labels operators who meet the standards of ecotourism.

Current Situation

Ecotourism in Australia is an immensely important industry as it is home to many unique environments and wildlife. As of 1998, Australia is home to over eleven World Heritage areas both natural and cultural as well as over 2000 national parks and reserves. Other unique draws include over 300 species of birds and 500 different tree species of the eucalypt family. Perhaps the greatest natural attraction is the Great Barrier Reef, well known as one of the largest living organisms on Earth. Despite the droves of tourists (about 1.5 million visitors annually according to Dowling, 2001, p. 143) and revenue brought in each year, severe damage has been done to the reef. The very people who come to see it have caused enough irreparable damage to raise alarm in the scientific community. A compilation of this and other threats may cause the reef to die off, losing a great deal of biodiversity along with it (Neale & Lamb, 1998, p. 224).

Cultural values are an important quality of Australia's ecotourism requirements, but there is little involvement with the indigenous population. Consultation, negotiation, and cooperation are crucial for maintaining cultural heritage (Dowling, 2001, p. 144). The cultural goal of an ecotourist is to learn and appreciate native cultures and help them develop on their own terms. It is not about going to see native cultures in their natural settings as if they were animals in a zoo. The aboriginal people of Australia (much like other people of native cultures) do not enjoy being

gawked at as if their sole purpose was to provide entertainment for tourism. They expect visitors to respect their culture. Australia does have a few areas in which involving aborigines successful. At Uluru, the famous monolith found in Australia's red center, aborigines lead guided walking tours, give tracking and food processing demonstrations, perform traditional routines and display other day to day aspects of life. Residents of the Tiwi community on Melville Island lead small tours for people to see how an isolated community develops. Tourists have to opportunity to fish and taste their catch, but most of the produce is returned to the local community so as not to exhaust the vital resource (Wearing, 2001, p. 400). While these are great examples of ecotourism success, there are still more opportunities for aboriginal people that require careful development.

As I will demonstrate, while ecotourism in Australia has many strong points, it is not as exemplary as some in the industry give it credit for. The certification program is certainly a step in the right direction; however it may be time to raise the expectations. As it stands now, it seems that achieving ecotourism certification can be done with minor adjustments to operations. With an environment that is so fragile, it is important to ensure that attractions are truly having a positive impact. It appears that even fancy resort destinations that rely on sand and surf to attract customers can be certified. These destinations that exploit natural resources without taking care of them are exactly what the industry strives to avoid.

The Australian's approach to ecotourism falls into the softer side of the spectrum, with their definition being, "nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable [which] involves an appropriate return to the local community and long-term conservation resource" (Fennell, Buckley, & Weaver, 2001, p. 467). While it does mention connection to community, this broad

definition is missing the cultural element of ecotourism. Another interpretation comes from David Weaver of from Griffith University of Australia's school of Tourism and Hotel Management who claims that, "ecotourism is a subset of both nature-based and sustainable tourism, and overlaps with adventure, cultural, and [beach tourism]" (Weaver, 2001, p. 2). Weaver's definition is even broader than the general interpretation, yet includes all of the elements of ecotourism. It is a mixture of elements that combines various branches of tourism. These loose interpretations allow for operators to find loopholes, which leads them to be sparing with the ecofriendly portions of the business.

One example of a destination that appears to be missing the mark is Heron Island resort. This island and resort by the same name located just south of the Great Barrier Reef is an important habitat for many birds and sea turtles, specifically endangered species that often return to the same nesting grounds year after year. In addition to the resort and wildlife, it is also home to a research station for the University of Queensland and the centre for Heron Island National Park. The areas of the island not occupied by these structures are left for the wildlife and have been marketed as an ecotourist site that focuses on the principal of enjoying nature without disturbing it. Despite their efforts to be environmentally friendly through the removal of wastes and other precautions; there are a number of examples of environmental degradation caused by the operation of the resort and other development. All of the previously mentioned structures encroach upon crucial environmental habitat and the light pollution that comes from operating these buildings has also caused confusion among hatchlings increasing their mortality rates. Tourist behavior also disturbs the nesting process causing some seabirds to abandon their young. Dredging around the island has altered the underwater habitat and progresses beach erosion (Orams, 2001, p. 30-31). As it stands, Heron Island is an advanced ecotourism certified

destination, but appears to be causing a great deal of harm to the surrounding ecosystems and lacks any cultural connection. We should not see this as reason to abandon ecotourism efforts, but instead to continue pursuit of bettering the ecotourism system. Even small changes such as promoting litter clean up, turning off lights and banning recreational fishing would dramatically improve this situation.

Case Studies

Based on the previously mentioned ecotourism standards, I would like to compare two destinations I visited during my time in Australia. The first of these destinations is the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary found in Gold Coast of Queensland. Animal sanctuaries like Currumbin are more than a zoo; these places help to promote the conservation of animals. Currumbin is advanced ecotourism certified by the Ecotourism Australia program. This sanctuary is operated at the state level by a National Trust. All earnings from this not for profit institute go toward preserving animals and the environment. In addition to this, Currumbin is a wonderful place for visitors to see and connect with Australia's native wildlife, as it is one of the world's largest collections of this kind. They offer opportunities to connect with animals such as petting and feeding the kangaroos or the wild lorikeets. Photo opportunities with animals such as owls, snakes, and koalas are another way guests get to bond with animals. All of these interactions are monitored by staff to help protect both the animals and the guests. There is also an on-site animal hospital where visitors can see animals being treated for injuries. Experiences like this help patrons care more about these animals and perhaps encourages people to help save them.

Additionally, signage, activities and animal shows help the public learn about the animals and their needs. Environment preservation is also promoted through activities and exhibits.

As for cultural experience, Currumbin has an Aboriginal dance show each day where performers share several dances and their meanings with the audience. The show is brief, but there is an evening show called Yanguwah (meaning welcome in the local Yugambeh language) where the show goes into more detail about the culture and hosts a traditional meal. Two shows allows for more viewing opportunity. The day time show reaches a general audience and hopefully entices them to learn more. Although the animals are the main attraction for the sanctuary, the shows add to the experience. The evening show is for those who are more specifically interested in the cultural experience. Both shows are protected from photography and filming in an effort to keep the traditions from being copied and commodified.

Currumbin provides an excellent example of a little park that has come a long way in terms of ecotourism, but it could still do more to improve. The weakest point of Currumbin is their connection with native culture. It is not enough to invite aboriginals to come put on a show. This behavior is not all that unlike past commodification and exploitation seen with other cultures such as the native islanders of Hawaii. There were several gift shops on the premises which help raise money that goes back into conservation and research. These shops also provide a great opportunity for aboriginal people to sell their crafts. It would be nice to see aboriginal employees as well. In addition to scientific knowledge, it would be interesting to add information about how these native animals relate back to the aboriginal culture. Knowing the history of the tribes that once lived on the land would make for an interesting exhibit. Another improvement

that should be considered, is using only naturally grown local produce in the food venues on site as well as the traditional meal during the Yanguwah show.

One of the other tourist destinations I visited in Australia was The Macadamia Castle of Knockrow New South Whales. In contrast to Currumbin, this destination is not eco-certified. A lot of changes would be needed to meet the criteria required for such certification. The Macadamia Castle was not designed with nature in mind, just profit and perhaps a link back to Australia's British heritage. It sits along the side of the road as a tourist trap ideal for young families with time and money to spare. Although the initial draw is the colorful castle and promise of food, it seems that The Macadamia Castle is going through an identity crisis. While it does provide simple amusement, it is difficult for a visitor to decide what the purpose of this place is. A restaurant? A store? A mini golf course? A petting zoo? All of these elements are a great draw for children but there seems to be no cohesiveness.

As the nearby highway expands, it will become more inconvenient for visitors to stop at this attraction. To avoid becoming a worn out and forgotten attraction, this business needs to recreate itself in a way that will draw expand its customer base. Even though such renovations would be expensive, ecotourism may be just the cohesive draw the Macadamia Castle needs. To give the castle a fresh look and feel it may be wise to repaint the place with green or earth tones. Local produce is already utilized at the café, so little adjustment would be needed there besides switching to greener operating techniques. The gift shop sells local products but could also be used to support surviving members of the local aboriginal population with their crafts. Both the playground and the miniature golf area could be themed with native animals and used to inform the public about local wildlife and culture. During my visit, I was told by manager Nick Bourke

that there are already plans for renovations that will turn Macadamia Castle from an animal park to a conservation park (personal communication, April 11, 2013). The goal is to replace some of the current animals with ones that are native to the area. At the moment, the petting zoo is more of a farm yard of livestock animals, with bunnies being the main attraction. Being one of a few places in the area where you can pet a rabbit has been a very popular draw in the past; however replacing them with native wildlife such as koalas and quokkas should show equal appeal. The habitats for the animals would also need to be redesigned to allow for a more natural environment. With these renovations carried out, The Macadamia Castle would come much closer to being an ecotourism destination.

These two destinations provide an example of an attraction that has come a long way to being an ecotourist destination and an attraction that still has a long way to go. The important matter is that efforts are being made, and I think this is an objective that is consistent throughout Australia. Overall the country has a good grasp on how to make it in the industry, but still has room to improve.

Section III

Tourism is an ever growing industry that continues to have a significant global impact. Over the years, ecotourism has come a long way in terms of developing its identity. Many have tried to pinpoint what it means to promote "true" ecotourism and a middle ground has been established. An ecotourism business must involve more than just man meeting nature; it requires understanding and giving back to the wonders around us.

Ecotourism promoters must stand strong against criticism aimed at the industry invoked by those claim to be green when they are not. In order to spread ecotourism, we must admit that there are still adjustments to be made. Certification is perhaps the best way to ensure that standards are achieved across the board. The value of certification is something that must be shared with consumers so they too appreciate a reputable business who aims to protect the environment. It is important that the resources of today are still around for the tourists of tomorrow.

The ecotourism industry has helped to protect natural resources worldwide, while still allowing people to enjoy them. While it has made great strides, more could be done to ensure the protection of our resources. Every form of tourism could work harder to leave a smaller footprint on the surrounding culture and environment. As the hybrid of mass tourism and alternative tourism, ecotourism should be leading the way and setting the example in this effort to protect our resources. The goal for ecotourism operators should be to provide an experience that educates and encourages travelers to participate in conservation.

In general I think that ecotourism should leave as little impact as possible, but if that goal were to be truly enforced, there would likely not be an industry at all. If environmental restrictions are too stringent, the destination may no longer hold an appeal to visitors. If there is not enough restriction, the destination may be destroyed altogether. Such is the paradox of ecotourism. A middle ground definition similar to the one offered by TIES must reach a consensus. Everyone in the industry has already agreed that something must be done, now it is time that the ideology and policy be adopted throughout.

Overall, I do not believe that ecotourism can be identified as good or bad. I will admit that there is a vast amount of room for improvement, but I think that it can meet its potential and be beneficial in saving the world's natural and cultural assets. Studying the industry of tourism has helped me to realize the impacts of my behavior as a tourist. It is this awareness that has yet to be fully realized among the tourist population. The public has shown concern for the environment, but now they need to be aware of the impacts their leisure activities can cause.

Despite being the leader of the ecotourism industry, Australia still has room for improvement. They started strong before many other nations had a clear understanding of how best to protect their resources. It is now time to raise the standards and promote certification across the board leaving no question about what it means to be green. Hopefully, if Australia continues to better its ecotourism field, other countries will in turn try to improve as well.

Australia will always have a special place in my heart. It is a country of wonder and majesty. I will never forget how it felt when we reached the end of the trail and looked out at a gorgeous landscape of trees and hills from atop of Bald Rock. I learned so much throughout my journey and was certainly impressed by what I saw. Australians truly have something exceptional that they have a right to be proud of and should want to protect. I hope that many others can experience Australia as I did. With more informed tourists and a rigid universal policy, the wonders of Australia will hopefully be around a long time for others to enjoy.

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Artist Statement

As I addressed in my thesis, Australia is a country that possesses a beautiful but delicate assortment of ecosystems and natural wonders. I created this brochure as a way to promote ecotourism within the country. It is a very basic tool for travel consultants to use as an introduction to both ecotourism and Australia. The "Travel Smart" part of the title comes from an imagined company that would produce a series of ecotourism brochures for countries around the world.

The outside of the brochure includes the colors black, green, white, red, and yellow. The green color matches the green on the inside and represents the natural environment. Black, red, and yellow are the three colors of the aboriginal flag. Yellow represents the sun, black represents the aboriginal people, and red represents the earth. The dotted lines and spots were inspired by aboriginal designs. The two pictures on the front characterize the two major elements of ecotourism, nature and culture. The other elements of the outside seemed an appropriate way to introduce someone unfamiliar with ecotourism.

As a geographer, I find that any good brochure must include a map. The inside of the brochure puts a simplified map of the continent in the spotlight. As a basic introduction, I felt that there was no need to include all the tiny islands around the coast line. Eliminating these allowed more space for text. The majority of the text consists of the more natural attractions and activities divided up by region. The vague outline of features is meant to intrigue and provoke curiosity. Rather than describe a few individual attractions that might only appeal to some travelers, I wanted to include several features that may interest a wide range of visitors. Unlike the outside of the brochure, the inner color scheme lacks significance.

I enjoy creating publications like this. As someone who learns through visual stimulation, I think a brochure is an important tool. With the approach of technology age, travel agents and their brochures had to adapt to a change in public interest. Printed media has become less common, but I think a brochure is more likely to attract attention than a misplaced file on a phone.

Brochure Resources

Several of the pictures on the inside of the brochure as well as the lower one on the front cover were obtained from the Tourism Australia Image Gallery. All others are property of Quantas Airlines.

The Australia Ecotourism Certification logo is property of the Ecotourism Australia Organization. The image was obtained from: http://www.kimberleywilderness.com.au/files/images/5001/26308_ecotourism_australia_logo.jpg

Information on the document has been adapted from the thesis with help from:

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Australia

The Land Down Under is the home of many spectacular things for visitors to enjoy. Part of what makes Australia a popular destination is its geographic isolation from the rest of the world. Its distance has allowed the country and its people to develop a unique and relaxed way of life. From its fantastic coast lines to its mystical red center, Australia has a bit of wonder for all to experience. If you want to see Australia in all of its glory, ecotourism is the way to go!

What is ecotourism?

Ecotourism is a responsible way to travel and see the world. Ecotourists are respectful of the environment and culture of their destination. They are knowledgeable travelers and aware of their responsibility to the environment.

Ecotourism in Australia

Throughout the development of ecotourism, Australia has always been a leader in the industry. Although it is known for being the home of rugged people and dangerous animals, the Australian environment is actually quite sensitive. Australia's biodiversity, rich indigenous culture, and natural beauty represent an important resource for better understanding our world and environment, a resource that demands our utmost protection.

eco TOURISM AUSTRALIA

While planning your trip keep an eye out for the eco-certification logo.

Tips for Traveling Smart

- ## Know Before You Go

The trait that sets an ecotourist apart from your average tourist is knowledge. It is important to know about your destination before you leave home.

- ## Plan Ahead

It is important to check that your destination, lodging, and activities are eco-certified. Planning on the go leads to settling for less than the best for both you and the environment.

- ## Be Aware

Remain alert to the environment around you and aware of your actions. Keep in mind what kind of footprint your behavior may leave behind.

- ## Skip the Car

Help reduce vehicle pollution and enjoy the beauty of the country by taking an alternate form of transportation.

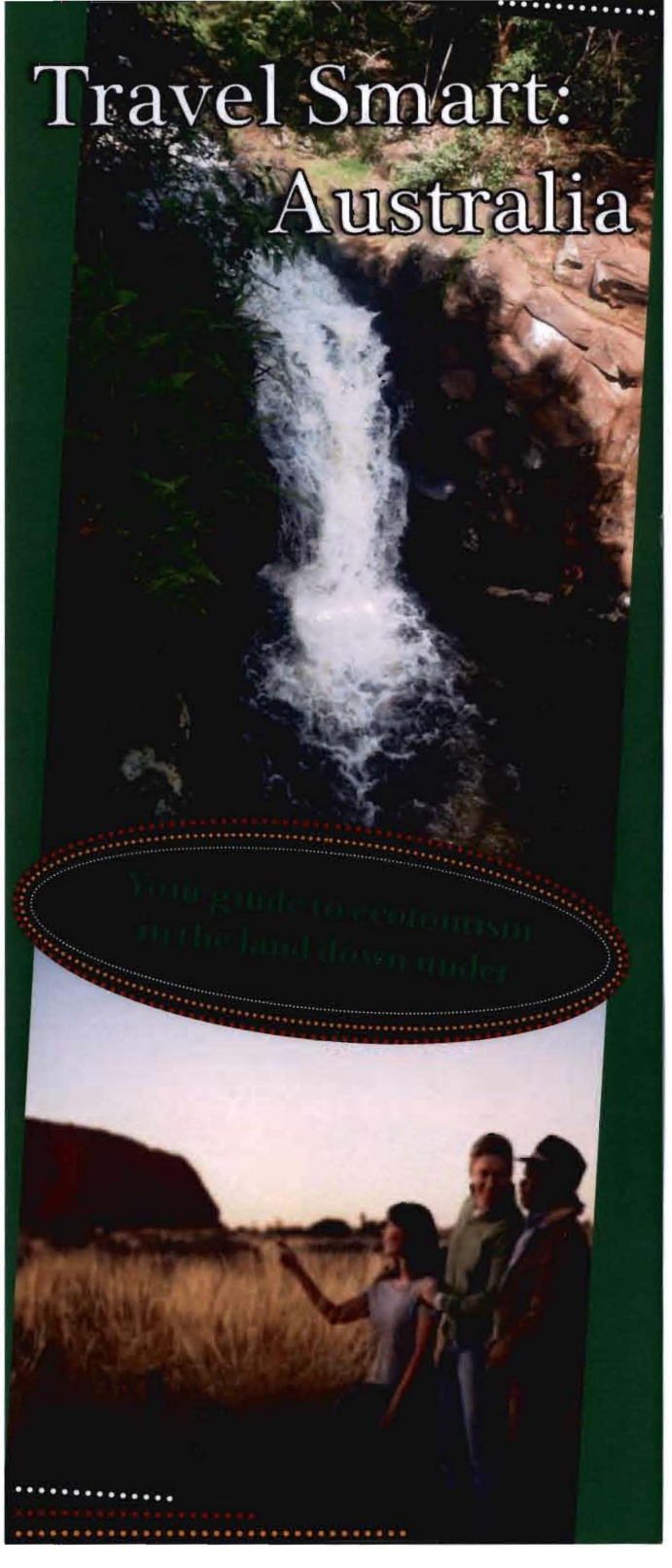
- ## Leave No Trace

Clean up your act! Leave no rubbish behind when you pack up for your next destination. Remember, you are a guest. Do not take natural souvenirs from the environment. Take pictures and lessons learned home as memories or buy goods that support the local community.

For more ecotourism ideas visit: www.ecotourism.org.au

Created by Rachel Brickley 2013 Honors Thesis

Travel Smart: Australia

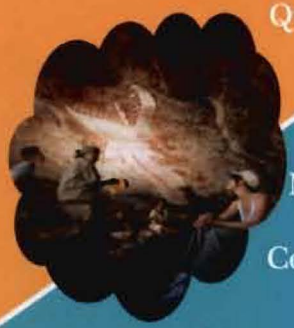


Northern Territory

Hamelin Pool
Nourlangie
Yellow Water
Nambung National Park
Kakadu National Park
Uluru– Kata Juta National Park
Tiwi Tours
Bawaka Cultural Experiences
Seven Spirit Bay
Alice Springs
Katherine Gorge
Arnhem Land
Watarrka National Park
Waterfalls
Crocodiles
The Lost City

Western Australia

Rottnest Island
Wild Flowers
Bungle Bungles
Rudall River National Park
Margaret River
Mundrabilla Plains
Pocillopora Reef
Stirling Range
The Kimberley
Drysdale River National Park
Wave Rock
Cape Leeuwin
Kalbarri National Park
Shark Bay
Valley of the Giants
Caves
Hidden Valley
Ningaloo Marine Park
Eyre Bird Observatory
Quokkas

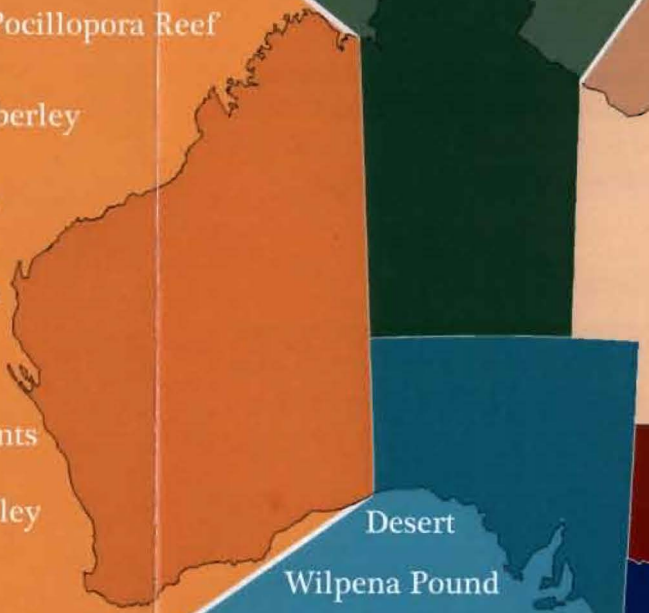


Queensland

Glass House Mountains National Park
Boodjamulla National Park
Atherton Tablelands
Undara Lava Tubes
Skiing
Thursday Island
Daintree National Park
Rainforest Adventure Tours
The Great Barrier Reef
Lamington National Park
Rainbow Dreaming
Millaa Millaa
Fraser Island
Fossils

New South Wales

Hiking
Koalas
Mutawinji National Park
Bushwalks
Farm-stays
Booderee National Park
Royal National Park
Mount Imlay
Jenolan Caves
The Blue Mountains
Dorrigo
Gondwana Rainforests
Kosciuszko National Park
Snowfields



South Australia

Desert
Wilpena Pound
Naracoorte Caves Park
Warrawong Wildlife Sanctuary
Cleland Wildlife Park
Murray River
Fairy Penguins
Kangaroo Island
Mount Lofty Ranges
Heysen Trail
Coorong National Park
Bird-watching
Flinders Ranges National Park
Tandanya

Victoria

The Twelve Apostles
Grampions National Park
Wilsons Promontory National Park
Melba Gully
Healesville Wildlife Sanctuary
Cape Schanck
Dandenong Ranges National Park
Alpine Walks
Murray River
Bogong High Plains
Little Penguins
Lyrebird

Tasmania

Platypus
The Nut
Wild Rivers
Tahune Forrest Reserve
Hartz Mountains National Park
Mount Wellington
Arve Valley
Cradle Mountain—Lake St. Clair National Park
Bay of Fires
Wine Glass Bay
Tasmanian Devil
Dip River Forest Reserve
Untamed Wilderness
Bass Straight Islands